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# POLAND TO-DAY.

BY ROBERT ATTER.

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POLAND presents to-day a distressing picture of chaos and disorder. The general disorganization in Russia is reflected here, intensified by the multifarious complexities of Polish national and patriotic questions. There seems to be a general bankruptcy of common sense. The governing authorities have completely lost their heads, capital has capitulated to labor, and Jews and Socialists appear to be at the head of affairs. Where it will all end, nobody knows. But the more thoughtful Poles fear that, whatever the outcome of the constitutional agitation in Russia, it is unlikely that their country will reap substantial gain.

Probably no country in Europe to-day affords a more interesting spectacle than the once great and powerful kingdom of Poland. Certainly no country presents more riddles, more paradoxes, more party divisions, more diversity of national character, more general and special complexities and complications than this one. It has been so from the beginning of her history. She was, at one and the same time, the most liberal nation and the most despotic, the most cultured and the most illiterate, the richest in patriots and in traitors, in great men and mean men.

Long before England had left off pulling out Jewish teeth, Poland tolerated the Hebrew. When England was torn by religious persecutions, Poland not only gave shelter to those who fled from the stormy times of Mary and Elizabeth, but treated them as her own sons. Their descendants have become Poles, but still retain traces of their English origin.

And yet Poland bought and sold slaves, long after England had decreed that every man born on British soil was free. Poland had a republican form of government with an elected King, and a Diet, yet one favorite's voice could turn the balance, and make

light of the nation's will. Poland welcomed the Renaissance as no country in Europe welcomed it. While Erasmus was trying to make Englishmen learn Latin, every free-born Pole spoke and loved that tongue. A Polish monk, Copernicus, paved the way for Newton.

To-day ninety per cent. of the peasants, who form the bulk of Poland's population, can neither read nor write. The student puts politics before his text-books, and the rural clergy are little better than the farm laborers from whom they spring. Poland's sons have ever been of the essence of patriotism. They have frozen in Siberian snows, and become blind in Siberian mines, for love of country. Yet there were those among them who sold the nation's birthright for Russian gold, or Russian titles. They put their land under the yoke of a people steeped in barbarism long centuries after Poland had enjoyed the culture of civilization. These spoiled her museums, burned her libraries, turned her palaces into shambles, razed her manors to the ground, and did everything they could to stamp out the culture which they were too ignorant to understand, and could only envy.

But, after a hundred years of slavery, after four generations of brutal repression, Polish culture still holds its own among the Slav nations. And not amongst them alone. Polish names stand high in the world's list of great men, musicians and painters, men of letters and men of science. As a nation, the Poles are broad-minded, intelligent and gifted, and still with all their gifts they are probably the most unhappy people in Europe. For they are under the yoke of the most corrupt government in the world. They are without friends among the nations. Their land has been partitioned and repartitioned by various Powers, whilst the world looked on with indifference, or used Poland's misfortunes to further its own selfish ends.

Now, what is the cause of Poland's misfortune? What is that radical fault in the national character which has left the nation bereft of all but memories? The answer is simple. Lack of solidarity. With all their high intelligence and rare mental gifts, the Poles never understood the real meaning of the word "politics." They never knew what it meant to present an unbroken front abroad, and to preserve a nice balance of power at home. With regret must it not also be said that too often they have not kept faith with one another? Bismarck once cynically

remarked: "When two Poles meet, there are two conspirators, with a traitor thrown in."

Such a nation must come to grief, and, moreover, can never reestablish its independence until it has learned the bitter lesson which centuries of misfortune have so far failed to teach. Whether Poland will ever learn it is a matter of speculation, and the turn events have recently taken leaves room for grave doubts. In fact, there are those who, knowing the country well, foresee a new revolution, a revolution of Pole against Pole, peasant against squire, and the Hebrew against them all.

Nine-tenths of the population of Poland is made up of the lower classes. Of the remainder, nine-tenths belong to the professional classes, and the other ten per cent., or one per cent. of the whole population, form the aristocracy. The bulk of these, who are large landowners, usually hold aloof from politics, except when they urge a conciliatory policy towards Russia. On the one hand, they are fearful of losing their estates by Russian confiscation, and, on the other hand, they have long realized that there is no hope of reestablishing an independent Polish Kingdom.

The Polish aristocracy is not exactly a model class. Many years of Russian oppression seem to have destroyed their capacity for either good or evil. The young have lost ambition and even the capacity for enjoyment. The men have grown effeminate and the women trivial. Both prefer to spend their time and money abroad, where nothing reminds them of the restrictions they have not the power to throw off, and are fast losing the energy to hate. They have, in a word, grown used to bondage.

Nevertheless, a party, never popular and now abhorred, sprang from this class in 1897. It is called "Ugodovcy," a word meaning Conciliation. Its object was to bring about a more friendly feeling between the Poles and the Russians, in the hope of obtaining certain reforms and concessions from the imperial government at St. Petersburg. Such a party was, however, doomed from its birth. The patriots looked upon the "Conciliatories" as little better than traitors, whilst the Socialists and Democrats hated them because of their rank. It is only fair to say that many honorable names were on their list of members; notably Sienkiewicz, the distinguished author of "*Quo Vadis*," who, however, has long since left them.

The party struck its own death-blow last autumn, by sending

a memorial to Prince Mirski, then Russian Minister of the Interior, couched in sycophantic language, denouncing its patriotic countrymen, and describing the time as the most fitting for cementing friendship between Pole and Russian. As this document was signed by only twenty-three members of the Conciliatory party, it could scarcely be regarded as a very representative national manifesto. Its publication, nevertheless, aroused such popular indignation that many of the signatories have since tried to disassociate themselves from the memorial. To-day the "Ugodovcy" has practically lost any little influence it ever had. For, although the average well-to-do Pole no longer believes in revolution, he has no friendly feelings for the Russians.

The professional classes, the so-called "intellectuals," probably may be divided best into two classes, Socialists and Patriots, or the National Polish League. The relative strength and positions of the various Polish parties have recently undergone radical changes, and to-day the Socialists have certainly become the most powerful and the most prominent. Their programme, as drawn up at the recent Barristers' Congress in St. Petersburg, is a sufficiently comprehensive one. It includes the organization of a huge propaganda in Russia, with the view of developing the political education of the nation; the employment of active force against arbitrary administration; and preparation for a revolution.

Probably ninety per cent. of the Jews, students, lawyers, doctors and literary men in Poland, are now joined to the Socialists. While many of them call themselves Patriots, they are in the closest touch with the Russian Socialists. The responsibility for the peasant agitation and the school strike rests upon them.

The second party, the Patriots or "Reds," are simply aghast at the turn affairs have taken, and are trying in vain to stem the tide of Socialism, by issuing proclamations urging everybody to keep the peace. The small landowners, who are very numerous, belong to this party, and form really the patriotic nucleus in the country, holding aloof from the Russians, and keeping up their old Polish traditions as well as present conditions permit. These "squireens" are the backbone of the Polish nation, and, if the Socialists had not got hold of the peasants, could have done much in keeping things together.

No proper estimate of the forces at work in Poland at the present time can be formed without taking into account the Jews.

They constitute, perhaps, the most important party in Polish politics. There are two classes of Jews, the Orthodox, and those who have left their ancient faith and have been baptized. Part of these latter belong to the Patriotic party, and part are neutral, the majority apparently preferring to await the development of events. But the Jews proper make up a power which has to be reckoned with. They are the backbone of the Socialist movement, which is behind all the present agitation. The "Bund," as the organization of Jewish Socialists is called, is the strongest, wealthiest and most influential of all these societies. It is generally believed to include most of what may be termed the "bomb-throwing" element, or party of violence, and its preference for such methods, coupled with the strong position it has attained, causes much anxiety among the old patriots, who see nothing but destruction ahead if Socialism gains more ground.

The predominant rôle which the "Bund," aided by the Russian revolutionaries, is playing, especially in the perpetration of deeds of violence, is beginning to arouse the indignation of the Poles, who assert that, as a nation, they are peaceably disposed, and averse to wanton bloodshed. They do not relish the "bomb" methods, feeling that such a course can only result in ultimate harm to their national cause. Hence a distinct anti-Semitic sentiment is slowly manifesting itself, which, if fanned by the Russian officials after their usual skilful manner, may have very disastrous ends. It is possible that the Patriots, and even a few of the milder Socialists, will join and turn the whole movement into an anti-Semitic demonstration such as took place in 1877, when political ferments ended in the Jewish quarter of Warsaw being sacked and the Jews having to flee from Russian soldiers and Polish populace alike. Russia, true to her policy, did not choose to interfere. But, should the revolutionary party in Russia overthrow the present government, which it is generally believed here will be the case, this anti-Semitic feeling will come to a head much sooner, as even the most democratic and advanced revolutionary party in Russia is not likely to grant Poland all her demands. The opinions recently expressed in the most liberal Russian journals, on the question of giving concessions in the use of the Polish language in schools, plainly show the truth of this view. The Poles may then turn on the Jews as the authors of all the mischief.

The Jews themselves appear to realize the danger of something of this kind happening, and are already adopting a less obtrusive attitude. The "Bund," in a secret manifesto addressed to its members and supporters on the eve of the Russian Easter, exhorted them to refrain from organizing or participating in any First of May demonstrations, lest they provoke anti-Semitic reprisals. And this at a moment when other Socialist bodies, such as the Democratic Socialist party of Poland and Lithuania, and the Polish party of Socialists, were issuing manifestoes calling upon all working-men to cease work on the First of May, as a protest against the existing order of things.

As to Polish demands, their name is legion, for each party has its own aims, as much at variance with the others as with the Russian government itself. We have the indifferent upper classes, loving ease, and hating Socialism; we have the "Conciliatories," denouncing the patriots, and advocating union with Russian autocracy; we have the "squireens" and "patriotic intellectuals," crying shame on aristocrat, Conciliatory and Socialist alike, and dreaming of a Polish King, and a Catholic University; we have the "Socialistic Intellectuals," a power in the land, inciting workmen and peasant against Church, King and capitalist, and striving to build up a democratic constitution, with the help of Russian revolutionists. And, worst of all, we have the down-trodden Hebrew, who, having cast in his lot with Socialism, is anxiously awaiting the result.

Before considering the recent strikes and disorders in Poland, it might be well to look at the general state of the country, and, first, with regard to education. There are 82 per cent. of "illiterates" in Poland, as compared with 65 per cent. in Central Russia, and 5 per cent. in the Baltic provinces. The estimated annual increase of illiterates is 1.2 per cent. in the towns, and 1.7 per cent. in the country districts. Only 4 per cent. of the peasants finish the very meagre course of education given in the elementary schools. Warsaw, the only university in Poland, has but one thousand students for a country of nearly 11,000,000 people. This university is considered to be the worst in Russia, only the poorest class of professors being willing to teach there.

Altogether, educational affairs in Poland are, perhaps, as bad as they well can be. There is a deplorable lack of school accommodation. It is often impossible to get children into the schools

at all, without bribing the officials; and, what is even worse, the professors must in many cases be bribed also, to permit the pupils to pass their examinations, which they must do to enter the university, or the government service, and also to be able to serve the short term as volunteers in the army, instead of the usual three or four years of conscription.

There are some ten millions of Poles resident in Russian Poland, nine-tenths of whom belong to the so-called lower classes. Of these, roughly speaking, seven millions are peasants living on the land, and two millions are artisans and unskilled laborers in the cities and towns.

The lot of neither town nor country worker is a particularly happy one. Coming to the more numerous class first, the peasant laborer, we find that in many respects his life is that of a slave. Summer and winter alike, he toils from morning to night for a scanty pittance, lives in quarters scarcely fit for cattle, and subsists upon a diet consisting chiefly of potatoes.

Of the 7,000,000 peasants in Poland, 3,000,000 are without land, a condition which has led in many parts of the country to agrarian disturbances. As a reward for their loyalty in 1863, the Russian government made somewhat vague and indefinite promises of a land distribution among the peasants, which as usual were never carried out. The awakening intelligence of the peasants is beginning to find out that they have been duped by the Russian bureaucracy, and they are now lending a willing ear to the Socialist agitators, who are everywhere in the rural districts.

Except as regards the unskilled laborer, the condition of the working classes in the towns is better than that of the peasant. In many trades, the wages earned by skilled artisans are fairly good, and would compare not unfavorably with those paid in England. But the conditions under which even the families of the skilled workmen are forced to live leave much to be desired. Artisans' dwellings are unknown, rents are high and the accommodation provided is miserable. For a single room only, the workman must pay in Warsaw ten rubles (\$5) a month, and, if he wants a kitchen as well, it will cost another four rubles (\$2) or so. It can easily be imagined, therefore, that the lot of the common unskilled laborer in Poland is a hard one. He may earn anywhere from sixty to ninety copecks a day (thirty to forty-five cents), little enough upon which to support a wife and family.



Three or four families of this class herd together in one room, in houses where the sanitary conditions are indescribable. When in Lodz, the so-called Manchester of Russia, I was assured that as many as eighteen people, adults and children, had been found living in a single room. That town, with nearly 400,000 inhabitants, has no water-supply, each house being dependent upon its own artesian well. Small wonder that under such conditions the rate of infant mortality is terribly high! These people live on a starvation diet, consisting chiefly of very weak tea and bread, with small quantities of fat bacon, herrings, potatoes or cabbage. On Sundays they may have a small piece of meat.

Existing under such conditions, it is not remarkable that, when the labor strikes began, they should have spread with such rapidity throughout the country. There is much mystery surrounding the actual inception of the strikes and the skilful management of the whole agitation. Everybody declares the Jews were at the bottom of it, but nobody seems to have been able to discover who the real leaders were, and whether they were in Austria, Germany or elsewhere. Strike funds were provided; but the strikers, who received the daily allowance of ten copecks, did not know themselves where the money came from. The whole movement was wonderfully well organized, and from the strikers' standpoint, at least, was in most instances brought to a successful conclusion. It was of an extraordinarily complex character, as may be gathered from the fact that there were no less than five separate and distinct strikes going on at the same time.

First, there were those in the cities and manufacturing centres, which were industrial and economic struggles. Second, there were the peasants, who wanted higher wages, better conditions of life, and to be permitted to use the Polish language in local government affairs. Third, there were the peasants in Southeastern Poland demanding land, whose agitation was mainly directed against the great estate-owners. Fourth, there were the peasants on the Lithuanian border, whose demands were a mixture of the two foregoing classes. Fifth, the educational and school strike against the Russification policy of the Tsar's government.

The peasants' agitation is still going on, and it is not yet possible to see what concessions the men will gain. In the cities and towns, however, the strikers may be said to have won all along the line. Many of these classes certainly deserved to gain some-

thing, as wages had not been increased for many years, although meanwhile the cost of living had advanced considerably.

The school strike differs from all the other strikes in Poland, as being the only actual strike directed against the Russian government. All the other various strikes had economic or Socialist foundations, and had little or nothing to do with the imperial government. The school strike is ostensibly a protest against the Russification of Poland, by the compulsory use of Russian in the Polish schools for all subjects except religion.

As a matter of fact, in this instance the grievances of the Poles are to some extent imaginary, as the Polish language and literature are really taught in Polish, and the pupils talk freely among themselves in that language during school hours, although by the Imperial Ukase of 1864 these things are expressly forbidden. It is the fashion at the present time, doubtless from patriotic motives, to declare that the school authorities rigorously enforce these rules, but in truth they do not.

The leaders of the strike, who, by the way, are all Socialists, demanded that the schools should be closed until the language concessions were granted, and the authorities immediately complied, probably because it suited their own plans. All the preparations for the strike were made quite openly, and the officials could easily have stopped the movement in its inception had they wanted to do so.

The more thoughtful Polish parents are now beginning to question the wisdom of having supported such a strike, which has resulted in their children having an indefinite release from study, which may have a very injurious effect upon their future. Naturally enough, the boys, and girls too, are delighted to have no lessons, and much prefer talking revolutionary politics, and holding secret meetings at each other's homes. Meanwhile, the Russian authorities are probably not greatly distressed over the unlimited holiday which the youth of Poland is now enjoying, with the consequent injury to Polish culture.

The commercial outlook at this moment is both discouraging and uncertain. The strikes have wrought a disastrous effect upon the industrial situation. The market in the Far East, which it was hoped would grow in importance, is probably lost forever, as it now appears certain Manchuria will pass from Russian possession. Even should it be made an open market, the Polish

industries would have no chance against the Japanese, owing to the great distance and the loss of their high protective advantages.

The labor situation will probably be further depressed when the war is ended by the return of a large number of soldiers to civil life, and it will certainly be a long time before business resumes its normal condition. Unless there come with the return of peace a great industrial revival, affairs are likely to become much worse.

The industrial strikes were settled upon most unsatisfactory conditions, which cannot possibly endure long. In nearly every instance, the employers simply capitulated absolutely to all the demands of their workmen, no matter how unreasonable or even foolishly stupid they were. They did not do so voluntarily, but only under the severest pressure of the authorities, who were so greatly alarmed at the prospect of renewed disturbances that they completely lost their heads, and insisted upon the manufacturers yielding everything in order to end the strikes, and thereby secure the restoration of public order. As regards the pernicious and far-reaching effect of such action, the officials either never thought or perhaps more probably never cared. But it has opened the door for all manner of future troubles.

Strikes were practically unknown in Poland before. Occasionally, one was reported here and there, but it was speedily and sternly suppressed. Now the workmen have gained some idea of their power. They have seen that they can get even the most unreasonable concessions if they strike, and that the authorities will not interfere unless peace is disturbed. The workmen will not be slow to maintain this advantage, and shrewd business men foresee that strikes will play a prominent part in the future relations between labor and capital.

With regard to the higher wages granted to the strikers, it is to be observed that, where the cost of labor is only an insignificant part of the cost of manufacture, this is not so important; but, where the cost of labor enters very largely into the cost of manufacture, it is a very different matter, and the question becomes very serious.

Even though bolstered up with a high protective tariff, the Russian manufacturer finds it very difficult to meet foreign competition, and, in fact, can only do so when his prices are much lower, as the superiority of the foreign-made article is marked.

When the present crisis is over, it will be interesting to note

how far the Jews have been responsible for drawing the Poles into Socialism, and also what Russian influences have been at work. Hasty observers frequently accuse the Tsar's government of stupidity in its governance of Poland. This depends, however, on the point of view.

Russia has studied the Poles as they have never been at the pains to study themselves; and, as a result, the St. Petersburg government has adopted the method, so successfully practised by the Sultan in Macedonia, of setting race against race—or, rather, in this instance, class against class. In 1863, when the fate of Poland was hanging in the balance, Russia played off the peasant against the landowner, and the rebellion was suppressed.

In 1905, when Russia is weak, and a well-organized patriotic movement in Poland would be more than inconvenient, Russia plays the Socialist card, and the danger, for the time at least, is averted. Poland, torn by internal bickerings, ceases to be a menace to the imperial government of the Tsar. The patriot tries in vain to stem the tide of Socialism; the peasant, encouraged by the student, regards the squire as a usurper; whilst the Hebrew is busily engaged upon a plan of campaign, in which he will be certain to gain something, no matter who loses.

Meanwhile, the Russian official, always eager to show the difficulties and dangers surrounding his post in hostile Poland, sends voluminous reports to St. Petersburg telling of the unsettled state of the country, and the absolute futility of attempting to introduce reforms or to grant the Poles any concessions.

Such is the state of Poland to-day, split up into innumerable factions, her trade and commerce well-nigh ruined, demoralized by a century of bondage, and finally in danger of falling a prey to Socialistic schemes, founded by the Hebrews, and furthered by the Russians.

An unfortunate country indeed! Will she ever be more blessed? Will she ever learn the lessons that years of misfortune have so far failed to teach her, the lessons of brotherhood and solidarity, of energy and perseverance?

Time alone can answer.

ROBERT ATTER.